

CONTRACT RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Best Practices in Supporting International Students enrolled in Toronto-area Colleges

September 15, 2022

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to increase understanding of the scope of the international student population in Toronto and the roles that colleges play in supporting their graduates as they prepare to leave the college and enter the labour market. This work will inform government and non-government stakeholders that are engaged in the international student program and in the integration of newcomers in the Toronto area.

This project will gather information on the profile of international student population at Toronto colleges: their demographics (age, country of origin, sex), their courses of study, duration of study, the proportion who pursue post-graduation work permits, and the proportion who transition to permanent residence. The project will also gather information on supports that colleges provide to international students and the ways in which they support their transition to the labour market. The presence, prevalence, type and scope of supports should be included in the report as well as any gaps in services that have been identified. Special focus will be put on any programs or supports that colleges have developed which could be considered promising practices.

Context of international students transitioning to Permanent Residents (PR)

Over the past 20 years, growth in the international student population, coupled with increased retention rates, have resulted in former students accounting for a growing component of newly-landed PRs.

The Government of Canada's sustained interest in retaining former students is rooted in the perception that they are ideal candidates for PR given their high human capital attributes: they are young, have Official Language proficiency, hold a Canadian education credential, and have spent time in Canada working and forming social and professional networks. However, despite these advantages, Statistics Canada analysis finds that some international students struggle in the Canadian labour market following the completion of their studies. They tend to earn more than foreign-educated immigrants, but far less than those born in Canada – even in the long-term. A number of qualitative and survey-based studies, including interviews and focus groups with students, employers, and post-secondary institution (PSI) staff, point to integration, and employment challenges faced by international students, pre-and-post graduation and following their transition to permanent residency.

By and large, difficulties accessing meaningful employment opportunities during studies, including work-integrated learning and co-op positions, is seen as one of the most significant challenges that places international students at a disadvantage compared to domestic students. This is a critical gap, as research indicates that Canadian work experience during studies and post-graduation is strongly associated with attaining PR, and successful economic outcomes in the long-run. Even among students and graduates with Canadian experience, underemployment (among university-level graduates) and earnings gaps issues persist in some cases. Broadly, international students and graduates can struggle with labour market attachment due to issues such as: possessing soft skills employers perceive as critical for the Canadian work place, employer reticence to hire international students, difficulties forming social connections and networks, lack of understanding of rights and responsibilities in Canada, challenges navigating complex immigration pathways, and in some cases mental health challenges and heightened vulnerability.

Role of Post-Secondary Institutions (PSIs)

Most PSIs offer integration services to international students. These services align well with the service suite under Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) Settlement Program. In particular, students are offered services related to: information and orientation; forming social connections; finding employment; improving their language skills; and navigating immigration pathways. However, access to and quality of supports does vary significantly across PSIs; there are no national or subnational standards for service provision. In addition, many PSI services focus on addressing immediate integration needs during a student's first semester/year in Canada; in interviews, students have identified challenges getting support to meet their medium- and longer-term employment and integration needs. In most cases, provinces and territories (P/Ts) offer settlement services to students; however, P/Ts have signaled that their services face capacity and funding constraints.

PSIs have an important role to play to support students' integration: PSIs are currently the actors who control the selection/volume of international students; they are a natural/primary point-of-contact for students during their time in Canada; and they accrue significant financial benefits from international students via uncapped tuition fees.

Much of the research about the international student population focuses on students enrolled in public universities, however the population of international students enrolled at public and private colleges has grown significantly in the past five years. Many college programs are of shorter duration than university programs. This may create additional challenges in accessing integration supports.

It is in this environment that the Intergovernmental Committee for Economic and Labour Force Development (ICE Committee) is commissioning this contract research project. ICE is seeking to engage a researcher/research team to do a literature review and primary research on international students enrolled at Toronto-area publicly-funded colleges and what supports currently exist for them as they transition to work after graduation and potentially permanent residence. The research will build on previous research about the international student population in Toronto, including the 2018 ICE research report *Growing Impact – Post Secondary International Students in Toronto* (Wayland & Hyman; <https://www.icecommittee.org/reports/Final-Int.-Stud.-Report-June-15-2018-final.pdf>).

Background

Fast and Uneven Growth Within International Student College Enrolment

International student enrolment in Ontario has grown substantially over the last five years, particularly at the college level. Between the 2016-2017 and the 2020-2021 fiscal years, international student enrolment in Ontario grew by:

- 127.1% (53,811) for colleges
- 44.5% (28,896) for universities

International students now account for a greater share of total enrolment at the college level than ever before. In the 2016-2017 fiscal year, international students accounted for 18.2% of total college enrolment. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the share had increased to 35.8%.

Economic impact of international students in Toronto

In 2018, a research study estimated that approximately one-fourth of Canada's international students study in Toronto.¹ The same study conservatively estimated that international students contribute at least \$3.1 billion in economic activities within the City of Toronto each year – roughly 1.5 times the economic impact of the city's entire life sciences sector. This includes direct expenditures on tuition, accommodation and the like, as well as indirect expenditures, such as hiring of staff to provide international student services and supports.

Scope of Work

The specific responsibilities and key activities of the successful proponent will include:

1. Developing a **project work plan** that incorporates an engagement strategy, research approach, research methodology and sources of data;
2. Conducting a **literature review** of existing research and data on the international student population at Toronto-area colleges.
3. **Undertaking interviews/focus groups** with key informants such as representatives from international student offices, International Student Immigration Advisors, facilitators of International Student Connect programs, and others.
4. Developing **key findings** on types of programming available and the ways in which this meets or does not meet the needs of international students.
5. Profiling **promising practices** by colleges in their support of international students who want to transition to the labour market and to permanent residence.
6. Identifying **key constraints** that colleges face in better supporting international students.
7. Providing **general recommendations** for how the integration of international students enrolled in college programs could be better supported.

¹ Sarah Wayland and Ilene Hyman, "Post Secondary International Students in Toronto", June 2018 (<https://www.icecommittee.org/reports/Final-Int.-Stud.-Report-June-15-2018-final.pdf>)

Deliverables

The deliverables for this assignment will include the development of the following:

- Development of detailed project work plan;
- Detailed report in a form suitable for public distribution and publication on the ICE Committee website. The report should summarize the work undertaken, findings from the literature review and interviews and recommendations.
- Presentation of report at a (likely virtual) ICE Committee meeting for internal discussion; and
- Participation in a report launch event beyond the completion of the report (perhaps through a virtual event should COVID-19 still be a consideration).

Budget

The maximum budget for this contract research project is **\$25,725** including applicable taxes.

Timeline

The anticipated project timeline start date is November 1, 2021, with a draft report due in early March 2023 and a final report due March 31, 2023. The successful applicant(s) should be available for the launch event of the report beyond completion of the report.

Application Process

To apply, email a three- to four-page submission to info@icecommittee.org with the subject line “ICE Contract – Best Practices in Supporting International Students”.

Your submission should:

- Outline how you propose to carry out the work related to this project.
- Demonstrate the requisite experience and capacity to carry out the project in the allotted timeframe, including your ability to do the required research.
- In addition to the three- to four-page submission, include a short resume or CV.

Application deadline: 5:00 p.m. ET. Monday October 3, 2022

We will accept joint applications from groups of individuals or organizations. We encourage applications from current graduate students and graduates with relevant degrees. Credentials and professional experience earned either in Canada or internationally will be recognized. Preference will be given to organizations/individuals with leaders self-identifying as women, newcomers, immigrants, racialized groups, and/ or Indigenous Peoples.

Selection schedule (subject to change):

- All applicants will be notified of receipt of their submission when received. If you do not receive acknowledgement of receipt within 24 hours, please check back to ensure receipt.
- Applications selected for an interview will be contacted during the week of October 10, 2022.
- Interviews will take place via videoconference the week of October 17, 2022 at a time and date to be determined.
- The project contract will be awarded by October 31, 2022.

- The project start date is November 1, 2022..

About the ICE Committee

The ICE Committee was established in 1997 by officials in the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto. The purpose of the committee is to coordinate the economic and labour force development activities of the three governments (and the various departments and ministries within each government) in Toronto. The ultimate goal of the ICE Committee is to achieve the effective delivery of economic and labour force development programs in Toronto. ICE has played a key role in bringing together critical players to share information on their respective programs and projects. For more information about ICE, please visit www.icecommittee.org.